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Encouraging Deep Approach to Learning through Various Teaching and Learning Activities

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Encouraging Deep Approach to Learning through Various Teaching and Learning Activities**Introduction**

I started the first round of this teaching cycle soon after I registered for the PGCTHE programme and attended the weekend induction programme in January 2007. Understandably therefore, the idea for the cycle was born out of reflections on my previous experiences as a teacher and a student, challenges I had faced, and how I could address these in my current teaching in light of the theories on learning and effective teaching practice I was amply exposed to at the induction weekend.¹ The only two on-campus modules I was scheduled to teach that semester involved teaching environmental law to non-law students in the Institutes of Geography and Earth Sciences (IGES) and Biological Sciences (IBS, now IBERS) respectively. The main goal of the cycle was to encourage a deep approach to learning in a subject area that was outside the students' field of study. This I did through a variety of teaching and learning activities that I believed would promote a successful leaning environment. I

¹ This approach is in line with Kolb's model of effective reflective teaching practice that follows a cycle of Experience, Observation, Conceptualisation, and Experimentation. Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as a Source of Learning and Development*. Prentice Hall, New Jersey.

have since run the cycle again in the subsequent academic year, taking into consideration issues that arose in the first run of the cycle.

Background

Early on in my teaching career, I had taught an environmental law module to fourth year undergraduate petroleum engineering students. My abiding memory from that experience was the difficulty students had in engaging with the module. To some extent, I understood their difficulty, considering that the concepts, language, materials, and indeed teaching methods must have been very different and unfamiliar to them. Having spent over three years as engineering students, a law module must have come as a shock to the system. There were no laboratory experiments, mathematical calculations or hard facts and figures. Rather, in the law module, oftentimes, there were no right or wrong answers. Generally, from the point of view of the students, reading materials were quite long texts not amenable to representation in some form of diagram or mathematical representation. Also, they had to contend with the sometimes quite old, convoluted and vague language of the law.

I appreciated these challenges even better when subsequently, roles were reversed and I had to take introductory modules in both economics and geology as part of my training for my PhD research. While these modules were touted as being quite elementary, I found that despite my relatively considerable academic experience, it was a very steep learning curve, largely because the concepts, approaches and materials I had to engage with were quite novel. My mind had simply not been trained to think and analyse materials in that way. The problem here is therefore not discipline specific or student specific but rather one which I have found in my discussions with colleagues to be quite commonplace. Indeed in the first teaching observation by my mentor Professor Dianne Rowland (see section on teaching observations) on the IGES module, she notes as the strengths of the session “the ability to engage a sometimes suspicious audience and maintain their involvement and interest. These are particular challenges in teaching students outside the discipline.”

Context and Rationale for the Intervention in this Cycle

Since the modules I was to teach were law modules designed for science students, it was likely to raise similar challenges for the students and hence my decision for the interventions in this cycle. Unfortunately, in my earlier teaching, while I did understand to some extent the constraints on the students, I had very little actual knowledge of different teaching and learning activities (TLAs) that could have encouraged more effective learning. I made efforts to make the module as interesting as possible (such as being enthusiastic about the subject, asking questions and using lots of examples and anecdotes). However, I resorted almost wholly to a “lecturing” approach which to the best of my knowledge was the general practice.² Unlike the general approach for law modules, the petroleum engineering department had not scheduled any slots for tutorials. On reflection, I could have integrated tutorials into the “lecture” slots, but unfortunately, did not even think of this as a possible option. Perhaps even more importantly, I did not quite appreciate at the time that while I “told” them, I did not “demonstrate” effectively the relevance of *this* law module to them as future petroleum engineers. Despite my best advice, generally, they were not very motivated about the module. On reflection, they must have seen it as just another hoop to jump through in order to obtain their degrees. In the various discussions I had with students as part of my efforts to generate interest, most thought it was a really difficult module and expressed a desire merely to pass the module. Only a few who were working towards a specific class of degree and for whom the grade from this module was crucial indicated any real interest in doing very well.

At the time, I felt I had done by best in the circumstances, and saw the lack of motivation as a “problem” of the students. This was reinforced in discussion with

² Various studies have shown that this is one of the least effective means of learning and that most people only remember about 20% of what they hear. See for instance, Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press. p 80. See also, Magennis, Saranne, and Alison Farrell. 2005. “Teaching and Learning Activities: Expanding the Repertoire to Support Student Learning.” In *Emerging Issues in the Practice of University Learning and Teaching*, ed. Geraldine O’Neill et al. Dublin: All Ireland Society for Higher Education. 45-54. Last accessed 20 November 2008. Available online via Creative Commons License at <http://www.aishe.org/readings/2005-1/magennis.pdf>

colleagues who recalled similar difficulties in teaching law to non-law students, and such perceptions appear to be still quite commonplace in my more recent discussions with colleagues.³ From my recollections, ultimately a significant proportion of the students did pass the module, with a few obtaining excellent marks. However, on reflection, I doubt that for the majority of students much “deep learning” had taken place. Even where this had occurred, there was certainly more I could have done to make the learning process less “painful” for the students. Fortunately, I only took that module for one semester as I left that institution soon after, and another set of students did not have to suffer the same experience at my hands.

It is against this background that I developed the interventions for this teaching cycle. Research indicates that most students are strategic learners and the teacher plays a critical role in engendering deep learning. This could be done by setting up TLAs and assessments that encourage engaging with higher-level cognitive skills (deep learning) rather than low-level cognitive skills (surface learning).⁴ My key goal therefore was to create a successful learning environment which encouraged “deep” as opposed to “surface” learning. To create this environment, I had to ensure that my teaching was “student-centred,” “knowledge-rich,” “goal-oriented,” and “community-valued.”⁵ The challenge here is not lack of a range of TLAs,⁶ but “selecting those that will do what you want them to do, in your teaching context.”⁷ The activities I selected had to be “suitable for realizing the objectives;” as well as

³ However, as Biggs argues, “Teachers might worry less about motivating students and more about teaching better. ... When they teach in such a way that students build up a good knowledge base, achieve success in problems that are significant, and build up a feeling of ownership of their learning, motivation follows good learning as night follows day.” See Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press. p 64.

⁴ See Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press. Pp 14-17

⁵ Bransford, J. B., et al. Eds. (2000). *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

⁶ See Magennis, Saranne, and Alison Farrell. 2005. “Teaching and Learning Activities: Expanding the Repertoire to Support Student Learning.” In *Emerging Issues in the Practice of University Learning and Teaching*, ed. Geraldine O’Neill et al. Dublin: All Ireland Society for Higher Education. p47. Last accessed 20 November 2008. Available online at <http://www.aishe.org/readings/2005-1/magennis.pdf>

⁷ Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press. p81.

“practical within my context and resourcing”.⁸ In respect of the former, I had to select activities that address the challenges students face in learning modules in other disciplines, and specifically those which I mentioned earlier that are peculiar to non-law students learning law. In doing this, I had to consider the practicality of implementing these activities in light of such factors as duration of module, class size, etc.

Choosing the Module for the Cycle

As indicated earlier, I had two different modules to teach to non-law students. I decided to focus mainly on one of the modules (BSM3610- Introduction to Environmental Law) for the interventions in this cycle. The main reason for this was the question of practicality. I taught BSM3610 alone, and therefore could implement fully the range of TLAs, while I only taught 8 hours in the other module (ES30310- Environmental Law and Assessment) and it would have been impossible to adequately prepare the students to undertake the final task (the negotiation exercise which I discuss more fully in section 5 below). Nevertheless, aside from the negotiation exercise, I did adopt in varying degrees all of the other TLAs discussed in this cycle which were appropriate in the context of ES30310. I believed these to be sufficient for fostering a successful learning environment in that particular module compared to BSM3610 in light of two other factors.

1. While the content of BSM3610 was one hundred percent law, part two of ES30310 was science based (the actual practice of EIA) and was taught by a scientist. The challenges I identified above about learning across disciplines, were in my opinion, therefore not as pronounced for ES30310 as it was for BSM3610. For instance, students were more able to see the law/science link in this module than the BSM3610.
2. Secondly, being a postgraduate module, the students on the BSM3610 module were more likely to have been more established as “scientists” and consequently likely to experience more difficulties with the differing approaches and materials between that field of study and law than the

⁸ Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press. p81.

ES30310 students who were still in either their 2nd or 3rd year of undergraduate study. Similarly, postgraduate level students were more likely to participate effectively in the challenging simulated negotiation exercise than undergraduate level students.

Other aspects of BSM3610 which made it well suited for the TLAs adopted in this cycle include the relative freedom I had to design the content to achieve the learning outcomes (although I had to discuss these with the module coordinator); class size (17 students in the first run of the cycle and 12 in the second); and the level of study (post-graduate). Similarly, the fact that it was to be delivered in twenty hours, divided into ten two hour slots (10 x 2 hours) provided just about enough time to implement the interventions effectively. However, there were also certain constraints. I inherited this module and therefore there was not much I could do about the basic design of the module such as the overall learning outcomes and mode of assessment (single 3,000 word essay at the end of the module). Understandably, some of these, especially the mode of assessment did raise some challenges in the implementation of the teaching cycle (this is discussed later in section 6 below).

Choosing the Intervention(s) for the Cycle

The key challenge, in my mind, was to ensure that postgraduate students with virtually no background in law develop and demonstrate a deep understanding of the sources and processes of law making, environmental law principles, compliance mechanisms and approaches to regulation of the environment. I realised that adopting wholly the traditional approach of “lecturing” where students were passive takers of information rather than actively constructing their own learning was not going to help me achieve this goal. My task therefore was to develop effective TLAs that would support the type of approach to learning I intended to encourage. This I reasoned had to be two pronged approach.

Task 1

Firstly, in light of the differences between the disciplines, I had to ensure that I created an environment for students to develop some of the basic skills necessary to effectively engage with the module through various activities and appropriate teaching aids and techniques. These include:

1. Providing guidance on where and how to access legal material
2. Ensuring that students are conversant with legal language and legal reasoning
3. Demonstrating that the module is relevant to them as biological scientists
4. Assist students to effectively “construct” and present legal arguments in writing
5. Make teaching as interactive as possible

In choosing the interventions for this first task, I drew from research on another category of students – international students- who may need to develop skills and procedural knowledge they may previously not have been exposed to. I aligned myself with Bigg’s recommendation that methodologically, a “contextual approach” where “TLAs encourage students to engage those cognitive processes most likely to achieve the objectives” was sounder than the “deficit approach” where students were taken out of the mainstream class to remedy identified deficiencies.⁹ I discuss the specific approaches adopted in section 4 below.

Task 2

The second task, was to ensure that having developed the basic skills, the students adopted a deep approach to achieving the specific learning outcomes for the modules. Research has shown that the most effective means of learning is by doing.¹⁰ According to Biggs, “Students need to find academic activities meaningful and worthwhile. Nowhere is this clearer than in problem-based learning where real-

⁹ Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press. P137.

¹⁰ Magennis, Saranne, and Alison Farrell. 2005. “Teaching and Learning Activities: Expanding the Repertoire to Support Student Learning.” In *Emerging Issues in the Practice of University Learning and Teaching*, ed. Geraldine O’Neill et al. Dublin: All Ireland Society for Higher Education. 45-54. Last accessed 20 November 2008. Available online at <http://www.aishe.org/readings/2005-1/magennis.pdf>

life problems become the context in which students learn academic content and professional skills.”¹¹ This interested me because the case study, albeit fictional has been a traditional pedagogical methodology in law. Here students are given a fictional scenario and they are required to apply their knowledge of the law to advise fictional clients. My experience of this (outside of professional skills training) has however been mainly in the context of assessment or tutorial questions rather than as an active strategy adopted in the “teaching” process by the lecturer. However, I found that problem based learning had been used to teach certain law modules,¹² including environmental law¹³ with students being required to be involved in simulated role-play to resolve fictional legal problems. Indeed, negotiation and role-play is a didactic methodology in other social science fields.¹⁴

This informed the main teaching intervention - the use of a simulated negotiation exercise to resolve a real life problem. As a TLA, it had elements of both teacher and peer controlled activities since the teacher provides the framework and guidelines within which the students explore the issues within their assigned groups. On the one hand, it provided opportunities for “focussing on prioritized content; imparting, explaining and clarifying information; providing feedback; deepening understanding through interaction with students. On the other, it was useful for “elaborating, broadening understanding, providing different viewpoints and perspectives and obtaining self-insight by comparison with others like oneself.”¹⁵ Also, to some

¹¹ Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press. p 63. See also pp321-240.

¹² Bailey, S., (2004) “Using Problem Based Learning to Teach Company Law” Last accessed 20 November 2008. Available online at <http://www.ukcle.ac.uk/resources/pbl/solent.html>. See also, Iorns Magallanes, C.J. “Teaching for Trans-national Lawyering” Victoria University of Wellington Law School, New Zealand. Last accessed 20 November 2008. Available online at <http://www.aals.org/international2004/Papers/Magallanes.pdf>.

¹³ Wolf, M.A., Eisen, J.B., “Practice, Policy and Pedagogy in Mandatory Environmental Law Course” (2000) *Water, Air, and Soil Pollution*, Volume 123, Numbers 1-4, pp. 409-418.

¹⁴ See for instance Humphreys, D. (2002). “The pedagogy and practice of role-play: using a negotiation simulation to teach social science theory.” In *Proceedings on International Conference on Computers in Education, 2002..* pp1063 - 1067 vol.2 Last Accessed 20 November 2008. Available on publishers website at http://ieeexplore.ieee.org/xpl/freeabs_all.jsp?arnumber=1186151 ; Alden, D. (1999). “Experience with Scripted Role Play in Environmental Economics”. *The Journal of Economic Education*, Vol. 30, No. 2. pp. 127-132. Last accessed 20 November 2008. Available online via JSTOR at <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-0485%28199921%2930%3A2%3C127%3AEWSRPI%3E2.0.CO%3B2-3>

¹⁵ Biggs, J. (2003). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: What the Student Does*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press. p 82.

extent, although different in nature, this sort of exercise provided some element of “practical” exercises which science students are accustomed to. The intervention also had the benefit of helping to develop other useful transferable skills such as working in groups, presentation, and the art of negotiation.

TLAs to Support Developing Basic Skills

Providing guidance on where and how to access legal material:

While this appears quite basic, and one which is quite easily addressed, I had learnt from experience that what is elementary knowledge in one’s own field is usually quite obscure to those in other fields of study. To address this issue, I provided a brief guide on the types and sources of legal materials, where to find them, common abbreviations, and resources where they could get further help on these issues. I gave printed copies of this to students in the very first lecture and also uploaded a copy to blackboard. This was a handy reference for students whenever they needed it. (This guide is attached in the appendices). Students were then encouraged to practice finding the materials cited in each of the lecture notes as well as case studies they were to read up for class. I advised them to meet the staff in the law library for help where they had problems. Prior to this, I had already spoken with the law librarian who was very helpful and agreed to “look out” for these students. Where students failed to specific materials, I gave them further directions, and failing all else emailed them electronic copies where these were available. The experience they gained in this process was also designed to facilitate their research for the single assessed essay for the module.

Ensuring that students are conversant with legal language and legal reasoning:

As earlier noted, legal language and legal reasoning can be quite difficult for the beginner. In order to support students to effectively engage with legal materials such as case law and statutes with relative confidence, I built into the module opportunities for students to practice reading cases. On each of the occasions, students were given a case to read with specific guidance in the form of questions

they were to try to answer. (See appendices). Starting from the second week, I eased students slowly into the process by starting with a relatively straightforward fictional case on a general legal issue and progressed to more complex environmental law specific cases, where they were not only learning how to read cases but also learning valuable legal principles on the subject. The cases were subsequently discussed in class. This varied between discussions in groups and presentation to the class and more general discussions by the entire class. The relatively small class size made both of these approaches manageable. Apart from the final discussion, most of the discussions were brief (maximum of 20) and I built the exercises into normal lectures as a way of varying activity in the classroom.

Upon reflection, this was perhaps the TLA that met with the most opposition from students in this cycle. At the beginning, most students had great difficulty especially with the length of cases, the language and complex construction of legal arguments. Even though specific guidance had been given, most felt the language was too archaic and that the judge was merely repeating the same issue over and over again. By the second case (which was actually the first non fictional case), there appeared to be a lot of frustration on the part of the students and I had great difficulty getting a number of them to contribute to the discussions. I decided at that point to conduct a discussion about their difficulties rather than plodding through with the case. One student admitted he had not read the case because he did not think “see the point” of it. Another asked why I could not just tell them the principles rather than having them read the entire cases since they were not training to be lawyers.

I surmised at this point that the underlying problem was not only the difficulty of the materials but that students did not see any value in the exercise. In response, I drew an analogy between reading the cases and carrying out experiments which as scientists they were used to. I suggested to them that the court room was the laboratory in which opposing interpretations of a rule of law was tested. The case was a written report of that test or experiment. Therefore, just as they were not merely told scientific principles but had to undertake experiments or carry out case studies, so it was with reading cases. This was a response off the top of my head, but

it seemed to strike a chord. By the next discussion, while the difficulties did not disappear, the level of engagement with the process was significantly better. In time, there was much improvement in their ability to decipher the main legal issues and judge's legal reasoning on each of the issues. By the final exercise which was observed by one of my peers in the law department (Nkiruka Ahiazu), she noted that "all the students seemed genuinely engaged with the discussions". This for me was a major achievement as far as this TLA was concerned and reinforced in some ways the importance of Bransford's "community valued" component of creating successful learning environments. I was again to encounter this in the main TLA- the negotiation exercise which is discussed in the next section.

Demonstrating that the module is relevant to them as biological scientists:

This had to be in practical terms such as in the performance of their roles in possible future careers and not merely a hurdle to cross to obtain their degrees. To achieve this I adopted a three pronged approach. Firstly, following the general introductory aspects, I built into the outline a 2hour lecture on the link between law and science early on the module. I invited a senior colleague in the department (Professor John Williams) who had considerable experience of teaching around law and medical ethics to take this lecture. As shown in the peer observation section later, this was the first observation I made of teaching by colleagues and it was a very practical and engaging lecture which generated lots of questions and discussions. The second approach I adopted was to ensure that I highlighted clearly in the lecture notes and presentation the role of science and scientists in the creation and resolution of environmental challenges, law making, and dispute resolution processes. Finally, the simulated negotiation exercise also demonstrated the pivotal role of scientists in resolving environmental disputes.

Assisting students in effectively "constructing" and presenting legal arguments in writing:

This was important because the only formal assessment for this module was a single 3,000 word essay at the end. As part of the preparations for the simulated negotiation exercise, each group was required to prepare a short essay (maximum of

1,000 words) and the students were given specific feedback as groups as well as more general oral feedback in class. Obviously, feedback on individual essays would have been a better option, a fact some students raised during the final evaluation of the module in both cycles. However, time constraints on the part of the lecturer had to be taken into consideration. While not entirely ideal, at least students had some practice before the final essay.

Making Teaching Interactive.

In addition to the specific TLAs mentioned above, I adopted a range of strategies throughout the module to support learning. These include

- a. Use of power point presentation which included graphics where possible
(See example attached in annex)
- b. Adopting a “question-based approach” which elicited initial discussions from students before presenting the “informed” response on the issue
- c. Using group discussion approaches such as “think, pair, share”.

The Main Intervention in this Cycle: Simulated Negotiation Exercise

The main goal of this intervention was to achieve task 2, (in section 3.2 above) i.e., that students adopted a deep approach to achieving the specific learning outcomes for the module. This involved using a simulated negotiation exercise to resolve an ongoing environmental challenge using the environmental law principles and regulatory mechanisms they had learnt on the module. For each of the years that the cycle has run, a different exercise has been selected. Each of these has been relevant within the local context of Wales. In the first year, the students had to negotiate an agreement between the government and National Grid and the various competing interests groups affected by and opposing the National Grid’s gas pipeline running across Wales from Milford Haven to the Neath Valley. In the second year, the project was the proposed Windfarm in Gorsedd Bran, Nantglyn in the Denbighshire County Council in Mid Wales (Both are attached in the appendices). The expected learning outcomes were that students will:

1. appreciate the range of conflicting interests in environmental protection and the challenge of law in balancing these in the law-making and dispute resolution process
2. understand the need for compromise both in law-making and in dispute resolution in environmental matters
3. Critically apply environmental law concepts, principles and mechanism to resolve an ongoing environmental issue
4. appreciate the link between science and environmental and role of scientists in environmental regulation and dispute resolution

Implementation of the Simulated Negotiation Exercise

The cycle was implemented in three main stages.

Stage 1: Researching the Project for the Negotiation Exercise

- ❖ First, I identified a suitable ongoing environmental project as a case study.
- ❖ Students were then divided into four groups, all of which except one were made up of four persons each (one group had five members). Each group was to research the main environmental issues and the competing of conflicting interests surrounding the project and the environmental law principles and concepts that could be used to resolve ongoing disputes. They were to write up their findings (maximum of 1000 word), and also prepare a 10 minutes presentation for class. Every member of the group was required to make part of the presentation in other avoid a dominant member of the group taking over proceedings or more retiring members not participating actively. Students were provided with both the issue to be researched and guidelines on what was required of them in writing. This was given to them at the end of the sixth lecture after they had been introduced to some of the basic concepts and principles. They had three weeks to complete the assignment, in which time, more of the content of the module had been covered.
- ❖ On the scheduled date (Lecture 12), each group made their presentations and were given feedback by a representative of each other groups following a brief discussion on both content and presentation. Upon completion of all the presentation, there was brief time for discussion where the lecturer and students

brainstormed to reconcile the key issues such as the main interest groups and the applicable environmental law principles and mechanisms that had been raised. From practical point of view, this was to ensure that there was a single set of issues and interest groups for the negotiation exercise. However, it was also designed as an interactive way of giving feedback to the students by the lecturer.

- ❖ Thereafter, new groups were created to accommodate the higher number of groups needed to represent each of the identified interest groups. I also used this opportunity to move individuals around in order to change group dynamics.
- ❖ Each of these new groups was assigned to role-play a particular interest group from the single reconciled list. Students were to be entirely in charge of the negotiation process, including chairing the session and time keeping. I therefore sought input from them for who would be most suitable for these roles. I was impressed on both occasions with the level of pragmatism with which they made these choices. It also showed to some extent that they had bonded well as a group and had come to know each other quite well. I also confirmed when the final list was given to them in the next lecture (Lecture 13) that they were all happy with their roles.

Stage 2: Preparing Students for Simulated Negotiation Exercise

As students had no previous experience of negotiation exercises, I had to prepare them for this.

- ❖ First I provided them with articles and other general materials on negotiations
- ❖ I also produced very detailed guidelines for the negotiation process. Students were encouraged to practice the role play in their various groups.
- ❖ In the second run of the cycle, in light of student feedback from the previous year, I held a brief 20 minutes seminar on negotiation exercises.
- ❖ Following questions from students during this seminar, I reviewed the initial guideline.

Stage 3: Conducting the Negotiation Exercise in class

- ❖ The chairs and tables were rearranged to create a conference like table for the negotiation and name places for each of the groups were placed on the table. In both cycles, students offered to come early and assist me with this task.
- ❖ Following some general directions from me, the chairs for the session took over and conducted the entire negotiation exercise following the guidelines I had given.
- ❖ Where necessary, such as where a key issue or principle was not being raised, I sent a note to the chair to direct the interest group.
- ❖ Upon completion of the exercise, they came up with some points of agreement
- ❖ I then held a debriefing session with them, where I gave a general summary and also invited comments and feedback.

Evaluation of Teaching Practice

Four main methods were applied to evaluate the practice. These are observation by another senior colleague from the law department, oral feedback from students after the exercise, evaluation questionnaire and performance in the final assessed essay.

◆ **Observation by colleague:** Professor John Williams who had earlier taught the students in the early stages of the module and therefore could form an opinion of their development was invited to observe the negotiation exercise in both cycles. He notes that “[T]his was an excellent and enjoyable session. It was an ambitious project, especially for non law students. It was challenging and I went away with the clear impression that the students learnt a lot and developed a number of their skills. The rapport between them was impressive.”

◆ **Oral feedback after exercise:** The oral feedback from the students in both cycles indicated that generally, they had found it an interesting and valuable learning exercise. Most felt they had learnt a lot. However, a major concern was that in light of the amount of work they put into the exercise, it should have formed part of the formal assessment of the module. This is a very legitimate point and I have discussed the possibility of doing so with the module coordinator in the relevant department. It has so far not been possible in light of concerns about too many assessments in the department. It is however an issue which I intend to continue to pursue. What I

have done however is to incorporate into the essay question the case studies and project for the negotiation exercise. That way, they can at least directly apply what they had learnt from in the formal assessed essay.

They also made suggestions for improving the exercise, one of which was providing more guidance on the process of negotiation which I tried to address in the second run of the cycle by introducing a short seminar. During feedback from the second run, one student has suggested that watching a video of an actual negotiation exercise would be useful and I intend to explore this in the third run of the cycle. Another suggestion was to run the negotiation exercise over two days to make the experience more realistic by giving time for reflection and discussion within groups about their respective positions. Although this is a sound suggestion, timetabling constraints may make this difficult and it would not be effective to have a gap of one week between negotiation exercises.

◆**Evaluation Questionnaire:** For the first run of the cycle, I relied entirely on the departmental evaluation questionnaire which I had seen and thought adequate at the time. However upon reflection and in light of some of the comments in the oral feedback session, in the second run of the cycle, I produced a questionnaire which elicited feedback specifically on the teaching interventions and its impact on achieving specific learning outcomes (copies of both sets of questionnaires attached in the annex.) to see how each of the . Feedback from both sets of questionnaires confirmed the responses from the oral feedback. In both years, very high proportions of students either strongly agreed or agreed that they found the module intellectually stimulating; and the case studies interesting, well integrated into the module, informative and assisted in understanding the topic (See attached chart). As can be seen from the chart, the proportion of positive feedback (strongly agree and agree) increased in the second run of the cycle. It is difficult to conclusively attribute this to any one factor. However, perhaps this could partly be attributed to the review of certain aspects of implementation of the TLA and teaching techniques/aids following the experience and feedback from the first cycle.

◆**Performance in Assessment**

In both runs of the cycle, there was a 100% success rate, with over 60% of students in obtaining marks above 60%. This I think is strong indication that effective learning had taken place. Here again, performance in the assessed essays improved in the second run of the cycle.

Marks obtained (%)	2006/2007		2007/2008	
	No of Persons	Percentage (%)	No of Persons	Percentage (%)
70 and above	1	05.88	4	33.33
60-69	10	58.82	5	41.67
50-59	6	35.29	3	25
40-49	-	-	-	-
39 and below	-	-	-	-
Total	17	100	12	100

Reflections on the Cycle

In light of the feedback from the various forms of evaluation, I believe the interventions for this teaching cycle has been quite successful. The TLAs were appropriate and helped students to achieve the learning outcomes for a module which was quite challenging to teach. As one student wrote to me in an unsolicited email, "... lectures were a lot more interesting than I was expecting... the group work was fun and is a valuable tool for a topic that could be very dry if taught the wrong way" (See attached in annex). Indeed from discussions I had with Professor, we were both very impressed with the level of professionalism of the students and were of the opinion that they had demonstrated a depth of knowledge which neither of us had expected. This certainly reinforces that a student centred approach to learning can help encourage a deep approach to learning. I now intend to implement the simulated negotiation exercise in an environmental law module (LA37720- Law of Environmental Protection) I teach in the law department.

Clearly, a lot of this has to do with the planning and effective implementation of the various TLAs by the lecturer. The implementation itself has been a learning process for me, and as I highlighted in the report, I have had to adjust to issues as they have arisen. At other times, the challenges had nothing to do with my implementation of the TLAs, but effectively managing expectations about the module. For instance, in the first run of the teaching cycle, I found that while there was a module descriptor, students had different and unrealistic expectations about the module that affected their level of engagement with the activities at the beginning. Following discussions with the module coordinator, we decided to jointly address the class briefly at the start of lectures about what the module and this seemed to work as the same problems did not arise this time round.

However, the success of the cycle was to a large extent dependent on the commitment of the students. Students invested considerable time to prepare for the various elements of the cycle and were actively engaged with their implementation in class. One cannot but wonder whether this level of commitment was to some extent due to the fact that it was a postgraduate level module, with perhaps better motivated students. Even with these sets of students, the implementation has not been without hiccups, with a couple of them clearly not as willing to invest the time and effort required, especially in the beginning. In light of this, would this particular project work with students at the undergraduate level? This is an issue I have been mulling over as I set about designing the TLA for my undergraduate students in the 2009/2010 academic session. I believe that for it to work effectively at that level, it will have to form part of the formal assessment for the module. I have therefore already written to the departmental examinations officer who has intimated that in principle, it sounds like a good idea. I am now in the process of designing the appropriate weighting and criteria for assessment. If this is successful, it may be one further argument for making the exercise a part of the formal exercise for the BSM3610 module.

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